



STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF CLAIM

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RESPONDENT BURDEN: We need this information to obtain evidence in support of your claim for benefits (38 U.S.C. 501(a) and (b)). Title 38, United States Code, allows us to ask for this information. We estimate that you will need an average of 15 minutes to review the instructions, find the information, and complete this form. VA cannot conduct or sponsor a collection of information unless a valid OMB control number is displayed. You are not required to respond to a collection of information if this number is not displayed. Valid OMB control numbers can be located on the OMB Internet Page at www.whitehouse.gov/omb/library/OMBIN.html#VA. If desired, you can call 1-800-827-1000 to get information on where to send comments or suggestions about this form.

FIRST NAME - MIDDLE NAME - LAST NAME OF VETERAN (Type or print)

Robert Thomas Alessi

SOCIAL SECURITY NO.

VA FILE NO.

C/CSS - [REDACTED]

The following statement is made in connection with a claim for benefits in the case of the above-named veteran:

Prior to my entrance into the Army, I lived a basic normal life as the oldest sibling of a middle-class family in Brooklyn, NY. I was educated in the New York City public school system as was my sister and brother. My father, now deceased, was a banker, while my mother, still living, stayed at home to rear us. I excelled in the sports of baseball and football in both high school and college, and was an accomplished musician of multiple brass wind instruments.

I was drafted into the Army on 9 May 1968, attended Officers Candidate School, and was commissioned in the Field Artillery. My first assignment was teaching Gunnery Mathematics, Self-Propelled Artillery Systems, and Tactics at the Field Artillery Center, Ft Sill, OK. I was engaged and married my current wife in December 1969, and was deployed to Vietnam in May 1970.

Upon my arrival in Vietnam, I was assigned as the Executive Officer of B/6-14 FA at the Special Forces Camp and garrison at Ben Het in the Central Highlands on the Laos-Cambodia borders. Due to ongoing battle at and around Ben Het, I

(CONTINUE ON REVERSE)

I CERTIFY THAT the statements on this form are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

SIGNATURE

Robert T. Alessi

DATE SIGNED

2 Oct 08

ADDRESS

[REDACTED]
STATEN ISLAND, NY 10314

TELEPHONE NUMBERS (Include Area Code)

DAYTIME

EVENING

PENALTY: The law provides severe penalties which include fine or imprisonment, or both, for the willful submission of any statement or evidence of a material fact, knowing it to be false.

flown into the firebase by helicopter while the base and camp were receiving and returning fires. The battle lasted for several weeks as we provided fires in support of the defense of the siege at the Dak Siang Special Forces Camp to our north. During battle, it was necessary for me to time the fall of and dodge incoming mortar and recoilless rifle rounds to maneuver into positions from which I could orient and control our fires. On one of these occasions, I was wounded from shrapnel while two of my men were killed and three were wounded in the same event. I was so new, I didn't even know all of their names. Several weeks later, I was also wounded from small arms fire during a firefight where I also lost troops who were killed and wounded. I spent some 8 months in the field at Ben Het. The experience was one where I should have been killed on at least four occasions, yet every time I escaped without a scratch while others died or were severely wounded.

Due to my technical knowledge and rather extensive combat experience at Ben Het, I was transferred to B/7+15TH FA at firebase Oasis shortly after that unit had been overrun. At Oasis, there was no infantry support, as opposed to the Special Forces and Mike Strike battalions that were at Ben Het. At Oasis, it was clear that poor command and

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control and substance abuse by the troops on the perimeter bunker-line were major contributing factors which allowed the penetration of the unit's perimeter during the heavy assault they sustained. It was necessary for me to stay awake throughout the nights to oversee and insure the alert status of our perimeter. It was also necessary for me to perform weapons orientation and control of fires that we provided during the days. As a result, sleep was short and the fear factor high.

Since there was no infantry support at Oaris, it was necessary for us to perform routine short duration recon patrols outside of our perimeter. Of particular concern was the extensive ravine complex which extended many kilometers to our west and north, and which emptied out only 300-400 meters from our perimeter. It was from this ravine complex that the VC and NVA had launched their attack which devastated the unit. I planned, organized, and commanded all of the recon patrols. During one of the patrols, we identified enemy activity in the ravine complex approximately 3 kilometers out. I judged it necessary to enter the ravine with a fireteam while covering their movement from flanking positions above the ravine. Prior to the entry of the fire team, I wanted to clear the points of entry, and elected to do so through

the use of fragmentary and white Phosphorous grenades. I used a WP grenade to signal the use of 12 other frag and WP grenades. Among the debris and dirt that flew out of the ravine were various body parts, to include a mangled, bloody head which landed some six feet from and facing me. The damned thing was sizzling from the WP. I remember freezing as I just stared at the head for what seemed like a very long time. I remember how I became nauseated by the sight and the smell of that burning mess. I have never forgotten that sight through the years, and it has haunted me in my dreams ever since.

On another recon patrol around the many miles that made up the ravine complex, we were surprised by what appeared to be a VC carrying an RPG on his shoulder who emerged from the ravine some 30 meters to our left. I immediately aimed and fired three rounds. My men responded with fire in that direction all along our left flank. I maneuvered with a fire team and discovered that I had hit and killed an old man from a village who was carrying a log on his shoulder. I remember cursing and throwing my helmet. My men told me it wasn't my fault, but I knew that some family had lost a grandfather. I all but cried in front of my men as we recovered the body in ponchos and withdrew from the area. It was a very long march back to Oasis. I have never

forgiven myself despite the fact that the event
 was ruled as accidental. If I had only waited
 long enough to get a more positive ID on the
 target, perhaps the old man, who had survived
 the many war torn years of his life, would not
 have died at my hand.

After some two months of recon patrols, live
 missions, and re-building the over-run Huebar
 at Oai, I was placed in command of a
 make-shift composite unit. We were provided
 with RVN infantry and ordered to proceed into
 Indian territory, build a temporary Huebar, and
 support some special operations in the area. We
 were firing, building, and taking enemy
 121mm rocket rounds on a daily basis for
 about 3 weeks. Thank God we had infantry
 support from the RVN, and thank God they were
 better than most. We were proled on more than
 two occasions that I can recall. I don't
 know that our hostility built perimeter would have
 held.

After the special operation, I returned to Oai and
 found that our unit commander had been "killed"
 during my absence, and that there had not been
 any recon patrols since my departure. I
 scrambled-up the patrols again and set about the
 task of calming down the unit to ensure that
 there were no more killings and that we

were again ready to defend ourselves.

I finally came out of the field just 5 days before my DROS. It was a long 5 days back in the rear with the REHFs and their pressed fatigues, soft hats, beds, showers, and no weapons mentality. The last several months in the field were very difficult for me. Combat was rather extensive, particularly for an artilleryman, and I was plagued with fear of not making it out. My last 5 days were spent alone. I didn't want a REHF for a room mate. Despite the rules dictating no weapons, I always kept my Russian Tokarev pistol concealed at the small of my back under my fatigues. That baby had been with me since Ben Het when I took it from a dead NVA Captain I had killed in a firefight. I took it home as a registered war trophy.

I returned home to New York in a very nervous and paranoid frame of mind. I was unarmed, except for the pistol with no ammo in my luggage, for the first time in a very long time. I sat with my back to a wall during each layover and watch everyone closely. I was under-weight and so grey-haired, that my wife walked right by and didn't recognize me when she arrived at the airport to pick me up.

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Life after Vietnam was difficult, particularly for the first several years. I was expecting to have to go through a readjustment period; however, it never seemed to end.

While on leave, two weeks after having returned from Vietnam, my family gave a surprise "Welcome Home" party which, as requested, I attended in Class A uniform. The party was held at a catering hall which had a couple of other affairs being held in other rooms. While smoking a cigarette in the lobby, some fool from another affair made the big mistake of asking me if I was the Doorman. I just punched him out on the spot. He was with a friend who made the big mistake of trying to defend his friend. I hit this guy as well and threw him out of the lobby doors onto the sidewalk. The police were called, but thanks to witnesses in the lobby and some very understanding police officers, I was neither arrested nor charged with any crimes.

The first three or four years after my return were probably the worst. Bad dreams, particularly those of "the lead" and the "old man" were frequent visitors of mine. There were other dreams, to be sure, but these, and a couple of others, were the worst. I would wake-up shouting orders and in a cold sweat.

What made matters worse was that I would experience repeat iterations of the same dream 2 or 3 times during the same night. It got to the point where I was too afraid to go back to sleep after waking-up from a nightmare, so I often didn't. I would stay awake and roam our quarters or patrol outside our quarters and our on-post neighborhood area or just drive around the installation for the rest of the night. In these first few years, my wife and I learned several things. She learned to leave me alone when the dreams were attacking. I learned that I would have to cope with myself and keep things private or risk the end of my Army career. I also learned that I could not go back into the alien world of civilians who could not possibly understand. I also learned that I felt safer and more secure when I was assigned to tactical combat organizations at battalion or unit command levels. Here I was with troops, in the field, on deployments, on TDY assignments and kept busy in the art of war. In this environment I could more easily handle the stress and strain of the dreams and the visions. In this environment it was easier to cope with my frequent outbursts of anger, for when things really pissed me off, I could easily take a break, walk out into the bush, and

beat the living hell out of some poor tree. I have been known to have dented several steel pots during my career. Unfortunately, my pseudo secure environment was routinely breached when at home. Through the years I treated my wife terribly. My short temper and impatience with her lead to many arguments. Through the years I withdrew from her in many ways, to include those of a personal and social nature. I became a workaholic and would jump at any opportunity to not be at home and to not take her with me. I loved being with my troops, on deployments, in the field, on TDY assignments, or just working late. In these modes I felt safer and more productively occupied despite the dreams and visions. The shame of it all is that my wife is a great person with a wonderful personality. She was a great Army wife and a great commander's wife. She was, and remains, a very good mother to both our children, with whom I had all too infrequent interaction. I was a stern disciplinarian with our children and tended to avoid any significant interaction with them for only one reason... fear of being killed. I believed that if I trained the children to be disciplined and strong that the bond between us would be sufficiently minimal so as to minimize their

trauma should I be killed. My taking every opportunity to absent myself from home was a major function of the children's training program. I wanted them to be able to stand tall, be strong, challenge any adversity, and carry-on in any situation, particularly in the event of my being killed. I guess that the reality was probably my desire to prepare my wife to carry-on without me as well. In the end, and for whatever insane reason, my wife and children have stayed with me and have understood, in their own way, the deep pain I have endured through the years.

Throughout my 23+ year military career I was always aware of my condition, particularly when my self-imposed readjustment period had lapsed in 1973, but the dreams, visions, fears, and anger continued. I knew that my career in the Army, and the safe and secure environment it provided, would come to an abrupt end if the Army ever found out about what I was going through. Further, I knew that I would have extreme difficulty trying to survive in the alien world of civilians. As long as I could remain in the Army and in positions to influence the action, I could more easily cope with my situation and continue to

function of a high rate of accomplishment.
 I was always a commander, an Executive
 Officer, the S-3 Operations and Training
 Officer or at least an Assistant S-3. This
 ensured my ability to remain in the war
 plans and execution areas of responsibility
 which guaranteed the maximum opportunity
 to immerse myself in the art of war
 fighting. Here I was comfortable and at home.
 Here I could establish and maintain a high
 level of technical, tactical, and operational
 expertise that would help in ensure victory
 in the next war to come. I fought leaders
 who failed to maintain these levels of expertise
 and trained my subordinates to make sure
 they were thorough professionals at their respective
 levels. I departed, leaving our loving the
 next war and, thereby, wasting the lives of
 soldiers again. As Dick would have it, I
 was fortunate to have been involved in all
 three of the Revolutionary War operations.
 Though a very unusual sequence of events,
 most of which are classified, I was granted
 the privilege of fighting again. Unfortunately,
 the lethality of that modern battlefield exceeded
 my expectations. The destructive force of modern
 weapons was staggering. The effects of our tank,
 anti-tank, artillery, and air-delivered munitions

on Iraqi armored and wheeled vehicle systems was horrific. The effects on the countless number of civilian vehicles was even worse. The highway north out of Kuwait City into Iraq was littered with miles and miles of the destroyed remains of hundreds of vehicles of all types, and what was thousands of dead Iraqi soldiers and civilians. Bodies and body parts were all over the highway and were scattered as far as 2 kilometers from the highway in the sand to the left and right along the entire length of the many miles which defined the kill zone. The sight of the fragmented bodies and the stench of the burned and charred remains of the dead was sickening, and was made worse by the heat of the hot desert sun. I had several memory flashes as I viewed the highway. The sickening smell reminded me of the odor I inhaled when I visited the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau, during my tour of duty in Germany in the late '70's. The staggering number of corpses that were frozen in time by the burning and charring effects of our weapons and the fuel and munitions that ignited in all of the destroyed vehicles was un-godly. With the exception of the bloody black color, the frozen and grotesque state of the bodies reminded me of the lava

covered bodies of the human statue-like remains I had seen at Pompeii, Italy. Body parts were scattered all along the highway, and when I saw the first charred and mangled head, I had immediate flash backs to the head that flew out of the ravine and landed at my feet while on that recon patrol near Firebase Oasis in Vietnam 20 years before. I should not have and wish to this day that I had never seen that highway. It was a terrible mistake on my part. I will never, ever forget the unholy sight and smell of it. My dreams and visions and links to the past will not let me forget, for they were returning often.

Due to my unaccompanied combat tour in the Persian Gulf War, I was offered a station of choice assignment as commander of the Stewart Army Post and teacher of leadership at the US Military Academy, West Point. It was here that I became a victim of what was later ruled in the Federal courts as an illegal "Reduction In Force" action which forced my involuntary retirement from active duty in August, 1992. I was suddenly thrust into the alien world of civilians with no employment and no home. I was forced to move-in with my in-laws while seeking employment and trying to cope with the increasing and

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severity of my recurring nightmares, visions, angry outbursts, and fears that were both reinforced and compounded by my recent tour of duty in the Persian Gulf War, my forced retirement, my level of fury with the Army, my being suddenly thrust into the alien world of civilians which I had feared for over 20 years, and the embarrassingly depressed life style that I had dragged my family into. I was a totally nervous and very angry wreck for over two years. In fact, I was in such bad shape that during the first six months of retirement my family began to notice the nervous tremors that I had developed in both hands.

During the first two years of retirement I treated my innocent wife so terribly that she, at one point, ordered me to leave her parent's house. I left and stayed with my parents for 2 weeks until we both cooled off.

After 2 years of reaching for employment, an opportunity to become a Senior Army Instructor presented itself in one of the new ROTC programs that was being started within the New York City Board of Education. Such a position meant my having to get back into uniform on a daily basis and enter into contract with the Department of the Army. I was still very angry with

the Army, but decided to bite the bullet and take a Senior Instructor position. Unfortunately, the position was in one of the city's toughest schools. After organizing and equipping the program, and hiring my staff of retired NCOs, we opened the program with over 400 student cadets. We experienced some challenges with the various members of the various street gangs who were enrolled as students in the school, but majored in class cutting, and hall roaming. They challenged our program in the halls and sometimes infiltrated our program. After repeated attempts to get meaningful support from the administration, I decided to confront these enemy forces purely out of a sense of self-preservation for the program and for the welfare of the good kids who were enrolled in our program. My show of force was an "in your face" non-physical series of public confrontations with a few of the most unruly trouble makers. In short, I, backed-up by my NCOs, called their bluff. They, when faced with uniformed soldiers, backed down. The word spread throughout the 2,500 members of the student body not to mess with those psycho Army teachers. They are just crazy enough

to do what they say. Our reputation was established and, as a result, the program and our student cadets were protected. With only an occasional need to reinforce or remind the university of my resolve, our reputation has remained intact through the years. Never the less, the generic stress and strain of a loud over-populated building, lack of student achievement in their often-then-5000 academic classes, parents who don't seem to care, parents who fail to reinforce the education system in the home, having to negotiate with 6 different principals, budget cuts, trying to work within a civilian bureaucracy that makes the Army's look like perfection, 12 1/2 hour work days including 70 miles of commuting through city traffic, work on weekends, etc., etc., has its toll on me during the past 14 years. However, I have kept busy and my dreams, fear, and levels of anger had become less frequent and less visible. That is until about 3-4 years ago. About 3-4 years ago, many of my former student cadets, who had joined the Army or the Marines after high school, began to return from combat deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. They always visit me when they are home on leave, and are often anxious to discuss their combat experiences with me. In their own way, they

they also sought counsel about the unpleasant events in which they were involved and matters which troubled them. They also had fears and doubts about the, then, growing comparisons to Vietnam. They wanted some form of assurance from me that their service and sacrifices, together with those of their dead and wounded comrades, were not being wasted in another give-away like Vietnam. In the interest of their own morale and welfare, I hid my own assessments and beliefs and lied to them. Each time I gave them a multitude of economic, US political, and geo-political reasons that assured them of our eventual victory and success in both the combat and nation-building missions of the US. It pained me terribly to lie to them then. Yet it was something I felt I had to do, despite the vivid reminders that I was routinely experiencing about the wasted lives, effort, resources, costs, and time that was Vietnam. Like the 9/11 attacks, I felt helpless and unable to fight back, and my anger was growing again.

It was at about the same time that I felt my worst fears were being realized as the similarities between the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and those in Vietnam began to affect me. Dreams and visions

that had become rather infrequent through the years were returning with a vengeance. My feelings of anger and fear of two new Vietnam scenarios were impressed even more when my son, a USAF Security Forces NCO, deployed on his first tour in Iraq. He has since completed a second tour in Iraq where he escorted convoys that have a nasty habit of being ambushed, or hit by command or kinetic detonated IEDs. I could not discuss my feelings or concerns with my wife for fear that such discussions would only increase her levels of anxiety as a mother. In fact, I again had to hide my own fears and anger and lie to my wife to minimize her fears by portraying my son's deployments as minimal risk events. Underneath it all, I was frightened and frustrated that I could do nothing to protect or even advise him.

During the last couple of years my dreams and visions have returned with a frequency I have not experienced in some 14 years. I have become more irritable and am very prone to losing my temper. My levels of fear and anxiety are much more pronounced. I have withdrawn from my wife to a point where I no longer sleep with her. I have become intolerant and impatient with my student cadets and

my staff. During the past school year, I frequently confronted both my students and staff in an increasingly belligerent manner. I have even had confrontations with faculty members. The size and scope of my school building, the thousands of students, the noise in the halls and neighboring student cafeteria, and the growing desire to beat the living hell out of some of the students have become almost overwhelming. Several incidents have happened between myself, students, and staff during the Sept '07 - April '08 timeframe that could have gotten me into serious trouble legally. The fear that I could have snapped at any moment compelled me to finally surrender to my condition. Out of fear and anxiety I stopped teaching in April and just left my job and went on extended leave using the over 100 days of accrued "sick days" that I have amassed over the years. I finally broke down and sought help through the VA in April as well.

I find that I am unable to continue teaching at all because of the serious potential threat I pose to everyone, including myself, from a liability point of view. I have tried to go back to my school on 4 occasions during the past several school months. I have not been able

to last more than a couple of hours before I am overcome by the need to hastily leave the building.

After 38 years of trying to cope with my traumas and trying to hide everything, I have finally reached my limits. I have had to advise both the Army and school administrators of my condition. Although they are all supportive of me, they are all in agreement that I am no longer able to teach anywhere.

I will be resigning my Army position within the next few days. I will also be required to sacrifice 18 years of credited tenure with the New York City Department of Education towards a 20-year retirement. I am in the process of applying for a Disability Retirement through the Department. If successful, I will be receiving a significantly reduced rate of compensation as opposed to the regular retirement I have worked so hard for to date.

Having to end my 38 years in uniform in this manner is extremely depressing. The financial sacrifices I will be making only adds to a more lengthy state of depression with an "every month" reminder. Further adding to my future prospects is the fact that at my age,

and with my skill sets, I am not qualified for, nor do I have the potential to be re-trained for any employment of a meaningful nature. I try to comfort myself with the notion that I can't perform any functions that involve other people for fear that I may snap at any time. Besides, after all of the years that I have suppressed and hidden my problems, it is high time that I finally focus on and care for myself on a full-time basis, lest I slip any further and lose myself completely. I am very concerned about my nervous tremors which have increased in intensity over the years. The VA neurologists have been trying to determine the appropriate medication that will provide me with some relief. To date, two different medications, to include increased dosage attempts, have failed to provide any relief.